

AN  
INQUIRY  
RESPECTING THE  
SELF-  
DETERMINING  
POWER OF THE  
WILL;

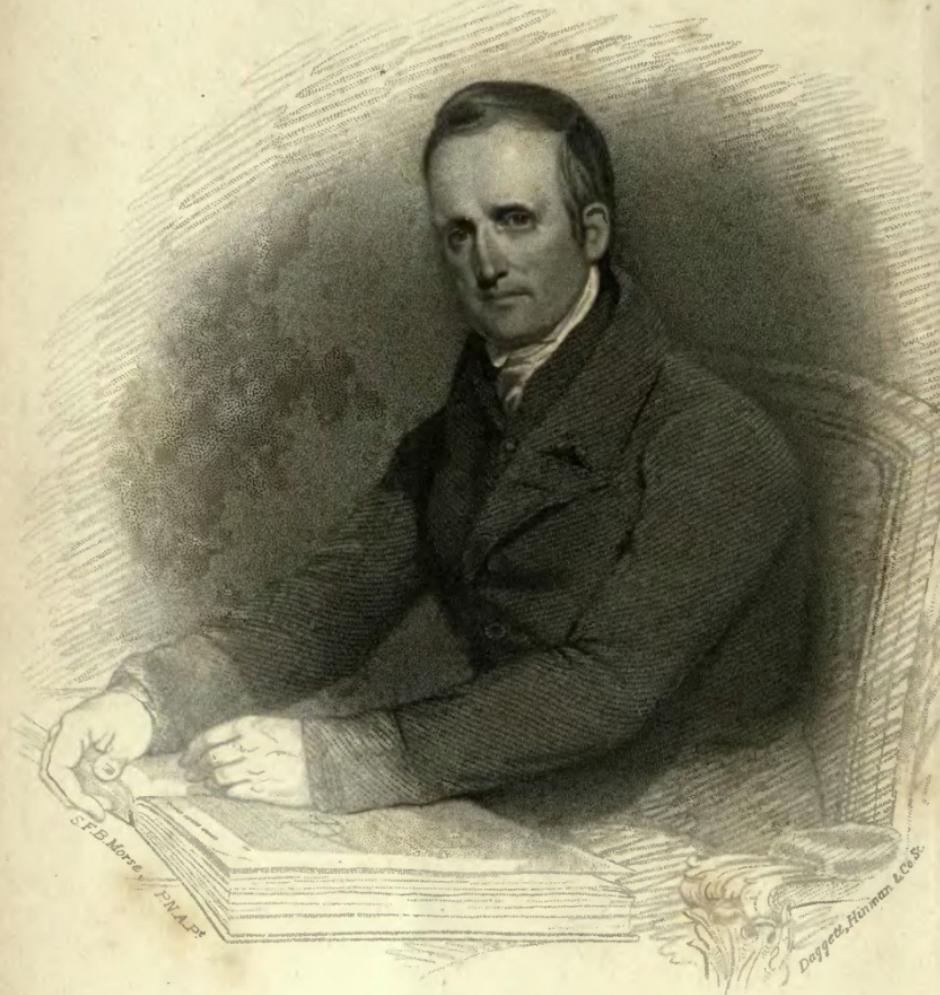
OR

CONTINGENT  
VOLITION.

SECOND EDITION,

WITH ADDITIONS  
AND ALTERATIONS.  
BY JEREMIAH DAY,

LATE PRESIDENT  
OF YALE COLLEGE.



REV. JEREMIAH DAY, S.T.D. LL.D.  
PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE.

*Jeremiah Day*

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# AN INQUIRY, &c.

## INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

*Review of Cousin—  
President Edwards on self-  
determination — Moral  
government of God —  
Testimony of Scripture —  
Ambiguous phraseology —  
Figurative language —  
Acrimonious controversy.*

SOON after the  
publication of Henry's  
translation of Cousin's





Edwards, in his treatise on the Will, has given a masterly exposition of the principal forms in which it is commonly presented. But for some reason or other, his view of *contingent* self-determination appears to have attracted less attention of late, than that particular mode of statement which he resolves into an *infinite series* of volitions. The doctrine of his opponents was this, that the free acts of the will are not determined to be as they are, by any influence from

















appealing to the authority of the scriptures, on the question respecting a self-determining power of the will. They will, of course, be so explained, as to express a meaning in conformity with the principles assumed. This is my apology for making an application of dry metaphysics to a subject so nearly connected with one of the most important departments of scriptural theology. Those who are prepared to receive implicitly the divine testimony, just as they find it on the sacred page, may







the terms in mathematical science. The value of a discussion upon any point connected with the freedom of the will, must depend, in a great measure, upon the skill with which the writer disengages the subject from the ambiguities of language which meet him at every turn. This is not to be done, by avoiding the *use* of such terms as have various meanings. For he will find no others belonging to this department of knowledge. The art of rightly using ambiguous terms, consists in so introducing and

























# SECTION 1: POWERS OF THE MIND.

*Cause and effect — Dependence — Efficacy of a cause — Complex cause — Efficient causes — Physical and Moral causes — Negative causes — Every change has a cause — Contingence — Dependent contingency — Absolute contingency — Power — Mental powers — Classification of Mental powers — The will — Volition — Emotions.*

THE point proposed for



CONSEQUENT *of something upon which it DEPENDS.*

Between a cause and its effect, there is always the relation of antecedent and consequent.

But antecedence is not the *only* element, in the notion of a cause. There must also be *dependence*. The darkness of the night precedes the light of the day. But the darkness is not the *cause* of the light. The one does not *depend* on the other. Every change in the universe, at any one moment of time, is the immediate antecedent of every change which takes place in the

succeeding moment. But every one of the former changes, is not the cause of every one of the latter.

One thing *depends* on another, when the one exists on account of the other, and when, without the other or something equivalent, it would *not* exist. This implies, that there is that, in the nature and relations of the antecedent, which *secures* the existence of the consequent. It is what is called *efficacy*, in reference to the cause; and *dependence*, in reference to the effect. An *event*, or



*not* that of antecedent and consequent, of cause and effect; thus, the quantity of surface on a globe, depends on the length of the diameter. Any change in the diameter would make a difference in the surface. The ground of dependence, here, is the geometrical relation of the parts of the globe. The velocity of a given body, moving without resistance, depends on the force with which it has been impelled. Any change in the impelling force would make a change in the velocity. This is

dependence of *an effect* upon *its cause*. A mathematical theorem depends on the definitions and axioms by which it is demonstrated. This is a logical dependence of a *conclusion upon premises*, not of an effect upon its causes. In all these cases, the dependence is certain, though the *grounds* of it may be very different. One thing depends upon *several others* taken together, when it is the consequence of these, but without the united influence of them all, it would not be what it is. One thing depends *in*





*depends, that it is the ground and reason, either in whole or in part, why it is rather than not; or why it is as it is, rather than otherwise.”* [Edwards on the Will, Part II, Sec. 3.]

“*Dependence* on the influence of a cause is the *very notion* of an effect.” [Ibid. Part II, Sec. 8.]

Even Dr. Thomas Brown, who has written largely on this subject, though he asserts, that the only essential circumstance of causation is invariableness of antecedence and consequence; yet uses language which implies,









follow from that alone, without the concurrence of others.

Some writers speak of *efficient* causes, as being a distinct class. But all real causes are so far efficient, or efficacious, that they are antecedents on which, in part at least, effects depend. That on which nothing depends is no cause. Dugald Stewart makes a distinction between *efficient* and *physical* causes; meaning by the former *real* causes, and by the latter, those phenomena in the material world which *appear* to be









belief of all classes, in all ages of the world. A few skeptical philosophers have *professed* to call it in question. But they have plainly shown, by their writings and their conduct, that they were as truly under its influence as others.

We sometimes hear it stated, very incorrectly, that everything which *exists* requires a cause of its being. This is a proposition widely different from the axiom, which has now been mentioned. That which has existed *from, eternity* does not surely require an

antecedent. But that which *begins* to exist, or which is subject to any change in the *mode* of its existence, requires a cause of that change; some antecedent, on which it depends for being what it is. It is not sufficient to say, that there is no *effect* without a cause. This may be admitted by those who affirm, that there may be *changes* which are not effects, and which therefore have no cause.

## CONTINGENCE.











and so far as it is dependent, it is not contingent. The very definition of this kind of contingency, renders it wholly incompatible with dependence. There can be no medium between the two conditions, unless it be, that a thing may be *partly* dependent, and partly contingent. If human volitions are dependent on nothing preceding, for being what they are, then they come to pass by perfect accident.

It is very important, that the difference between the popular and the





cannot discern, so as to foresee the event; but for something which has absolutely no previous ground or reason, with which its existence has any fixed and certain connexion.” [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 3.*] A similar distinction is applicable to the corresponding accident, chance, fortuitous, &c.

## POWER.

A cause always implies an effect. By observing the



substance, or upon some one of its qualities. The magnetic power of the loadstone is owing to the particles of *iron* which it contains. This, may be spoken of, as constituting the attractive power of the stone. Frequently also, power is considered as something *intervening* between the cause and the effect; a connecting link which is supposed to give efficacy to the cause. The harpsichord produces impressions on the ear, by means of vibrations in the air. The power of the instrument to affect the

ear, depends upon these vibrations. But in this case, there are, properly speaking, *two* causes, one immediate, the other remote. The motion in the air is the *effect* of the motion in the instrument, and the *cause* of the impression on the ear. Between an effect and its *immediate* cause, we know of nothing intervening.

Power is sometimes ascribed to *effects*, as well as to causes. The liability of a thing to be influenced by a cause, is called *passive power*, or more properly, *susceptibility* ; while the





when it possesses all the requisites for producing a particular effect, *except something which may be easily added*. We say that gunpowder has the power of exploding; meaning that it has this power when touched by a spark of fire. The fire is the additional element, which must form a part of the complex cause, before the effect will be produced. In speaking of *human* agency, we are accustomed to say, that a man has power to do anything, which he does *whenever he will*. The willing mind is all that is



antecedent on which the effect depends. This was evidently the meaning of the leper, when he came to Christ with the cry; “Lord, *if thou wilt*, thou *canst* make me clean.”

## MENTAL POWERS.

The powers of the *mind* are known, by what the mind *does*. Our own mental acts, our thoughts, our emotions, our purposes, are the objects of our consciousness. But every act implies an adequate cause. Whatever the mind













in our mental operations. In classifying them, we can regard only the more prominent resemblances and differences.

## THE WILL.

There has been no settled agreement with respect to that most important faculty called the will. European writers generally confine the term to the power of *ordering* some bodily or mental act. Volition, according to them, is determining to *do* something. A man wills to





from the will; as though they were two faculties in the soul.” *[Revival of Religion in New England, Part I.]* “The affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.” *[Treatise on Religious Affections, Part I.]* “The affections are only certain modes of the exercise of the will.” *[Treatise on the Will.]* But although emotions, purposes, and executive volitions are, in some respects, similar; yet, in other respects, they are different. Emotion is







## SECTION 2: SELF-DETERMINATION.

*Point of inquiry — Particular determination of the will — It is the mind itself that wills — One act of the will determining another — Are volitions determined solely by the nature or state of the mind? — or by the power of willing — Contingent determination — Spontaneous volition — Personality of the will — Originating volition — Is the mind the efficient cause of its volitions? — Causing*













the cause. In giving a reason why the wind blows, it is sufficient to prove that there are forces in the atmosphere adequate to its production. To explain why it blows East or West, rather than North or South, we must point out the particular nature and direction of these forces. The latter explanation includes the former; but the former does not necessarily include the latter. A man may ride often, because he is fond of riding; but this is not all the reason why he rides in one direction rather than

another. To account for a man's willing at all, it is sufficient to state the requisites which are *common* to all cases of willing. To explain the ground of his willing in a particular way, it is necessary to add the considerations which give to his choice this special direction. On the question why does a man will at all, the parties in a philosophical controversy may be *agreed*, while they are altogether at variance, in giving the reasons for his choosing one thing rather than another. The latter





his act is not their act. He himself chooses. He is the *author* of his own volitions. This, according to *one* signification of the term, is self-determination. And a *power* of choosing is, in this sense, a self-determining power.

2. But this is not all that is ever meant, by the advocates of a self-determining power in the will. The inquiry still recurs, what determines the man to will as he does ? What determines him to determine thus ? Is it a *preceding* act of the will ? This is undoubtedly the





have an influence, in determining *future* volitions, by placing us in circumstances fitted to excite certain classes of emotions. The man of gaiety and mirth, banishes serious reflection, by throwing himself into a circle of jovial companions. The pious man rouses himself to charitable effort, by bringing into view the various plans of Christian benevolence. The man who has been heretofore intemperate, but has now taken a firm resolution to reform, guards himself against a violation of his



within the mind which is *not an act*, or from something *without*, or from both together, or from *nothing*. The last supposition implies absolute *contingence*, which we are soon to consider. If the first act of the series proceeds from some *mental state*, which is neither an act nor the substance of the mind : that state must have had an origin, either from without, or from something within, which, if we trace back the chain of dependencies, and do not admit contingency, anywhere, to break the







influences, &c. ? This might be supposed to be the case, if the volitions of the same individual were all *perfectly uniform*. But they are very multifarious. One hour, he chooses to be active; another, to remain at rest. At one time, he is struggling against calamity; at another, exulting in the success of his plans and efforts. Why such frequent changes, if external circumstances have no influence on his actions ?

The present nature of the mind is either *original* or *acquired*, or has been given by the Spirit of God. In







wills, because he has not the power to *avoid* willing, in some way or other. But whatever may be assigned as the reason why he wills at all, the main inquiry will still return upon us: Why does the mind will one way rather than another; why does it choose one object rather than its opposite? Is the simple power of willing the only cause of this? Does a man choose to walk to church for no other reason than because he has power to walk in any one of a thousand different directions? Does he speak the truth for no other









*man* himself, but by the *volitions* themselves; that is, they are determined only by the *event*, by their happening to be what they are. They are dependent, for their character, on nothing preceding. The question, then, for our consideration is whether the volitions of accountable beings are *contingent*, or *dependent*; not whether they are dependent on the mind, objects of choice, &c., for coming into existence merely; but for being *such* volitions as they are, right or wrong, sinful or holy. The *mind*, it is

























and acts is not the will; but the *man*, the mind, the living, conscious being. An attribute is not an agent. That which makes a choice is not the mere power of choosing ; but the being who possesses this power. Though a substance without a will may not be a person; neither is anything which is wholly destitute of understanding, or feeling, or thought, as a tree or a stone, a person. But supposing it *were* proper to denominate the will a person, how would this relieve any difficulty respecting its agency in

choosing ? Is it easier to prove, that the power of choosing can act independently of motives, than to prove, that a *being* possessed of this power can thus act ?

But, it may be asked, does not a man *originate* his own volitions? They undoubtedly *begin* with him, in this sense, that they have no existence, till *he* puts them forth. They are strictly *his* acts, and not the acts of another. They proceed *immediately* from him. They are not produced beforehand and afterwards put into his





vicious *character* is concerned, they depend neither on the nature, nor the state, nor the previous acts, of the agent; with what propriety can it be said, that *he* originates their sinfulness or holiness? According to the supposition, he merely *happens* to choose as he does.

Is a man the *efficient* cause of his own volitions? There surely can be no reasonable doubt on this point, if by efficient cause, be meant the *agent* who wills. To be the cause of volitions, in this sense, is

nothing more nor less than to will. If it is the man himself that wills, it is he himself that is the efficient cause of his volitions. Or if, by the efficient cause, be meant the *immediate* antecedent, the man is, in this sense also, the efficient cause of his own choices. There is nothing *intervening* between him and his volitions, no connecting link, between the agent and his own acts. But if we apply the term efficient cause to *everything* which is in any way concerned, in determining what a man's



























the word is claimed in its application to *volition* only, and that, in this application, it can have no different meaning, whatever may be its use as applied to other subjects, this is giving a definition by which the whole question under discussion *is taken for granted*. The point in controversy is, Whether there is any cause of volition, *other* than the agency of the mind in willing. The disputant settles the question, to his own satisfaction, by saying that nothing but this agency *is meant* by the



substitute for *evidence*, but merely as preparing the way for a better understanding of the nature and validity of his proof when presented. This, of itself, is no *petitio principii*. The advocates of *dependent* volition have been accused of taking an essential point for granted, by defining a *motive* to be that which tends to move or incline the mind to a particular choice. The charge is well founded, if they rely upon this to *prove* that the mind is thus moved or inclined. But if the definition is given









choosing a thing is the only reason *why* he chooses it. It implies that, in every instance, the cause is *prior* to its effect. If for argument's sake it be admitted, that volition may be separated into two distinct parts, one bearing to the other the relation of a cause to its effect; *this* cause, unless it be the immediate agency of an eternal being, must have had another prior to itself. This, if it be simply the *nature* of the mind, it did not itself create; it came from the hand of its Maker. Or if it be a particular *state*







has had the magnanimity distinctly to avow his belief in it, and firmly to adhere to it, through a great portion of his book. It is upon this ground only, that he hopes to demolish the pillars of Edwards' work on the Will. It is, as he thinks, for the want of adhering steadily to this, that the other assailants of Edwards have so signally failed, in their efforts to dislodge him from his strongly fortified positions. Bledsoe's sword is a two edged weapon, which deals its blows, with impartial











understood, is full of inconsistencies.” p. 211. “Difficulties have always encumbered the cause of free and accountable agency, just because it has been supposed to consist in the self-determining power of the will. We should therefore abandon this doctrine.—It is high time it should be laid aside for ever.” p. 212.

But if the will is determined neither by itself, nor by the influence of motives, by what *is* it determined, according to Bledsoe ? By nothing at all. “It has always been taken













bring itself into existence? If so, they were certainly beyond the reach of logic.— I have never been so unfortunate, as to meet with any advocate of free agency, either in actual life or in history, who supposed that a volition arose out of nothing, without any *cause* of its existence, or that it produced itself. They have all maintained, with one consent, that the *mind* is the cause of volition.” p. 71.

*In what sense*, is the mind the cause of its own acts of choice? It cannot, according to Bledsoe, be the *efficient* cause. “The

philosophers of all ages," he says, "have sought for the efficient cause of volition ; but who has found it? It has never been found, because *it does not exist*; and it never will be found, so long as an action of the mind continues to be what it is." pp. 218, 219. An act of the mind, according to him, may be the efficient cause of a change in *matter*, but not of volition. "We can only infer, from a change or modification in matter, the existence of an act by which it is produced. The former is the only idea we have of an effect; the









the *power* of acting, it could not put forth volitions. The mind then, and the power of the mind called will, constitute the ground of action or volition.” pp. 215, 216. There must not only be a mind, and a power of willing; but there must also be *motives*, *objects* of choice before the mind. This Bledsoe admits. “A desire or affection is the indispensable condition, an invariable antecedent of an act of the will.” p. 93. “There is not an advocate of free agency in the universe, who will contend

















produce volition." p. 90.— "If any advocate of free-agency had really believed, that the passions, desires, affections, &c., exert no influence over the will, is it not certain, that he would have availed himself of this principle ?" p. 92.— "The principle that our appetites, desires, &c., do exert a real influence in the production of volition, was common to Edwards, Locke and Reid : indeed, so far as I know, it has been *universally received*. In the opinion of Edwards, this influence becomes so powerful at times, as to







Whether this is, or is not, a correct interpretation of the statements in his book, it is the fundamental point, in discussions on the will. A vast deal of unavailing contention might be saved, if the parties on both sides of the controversy would agree to confine their arguments to this single question. The multiform evasions of the simple principle upon which a right decision of the subject depends, lead to interminable disputes, respecting the appropriate meaning and application of certain technical words and





## SECTION 3: INFLUENCE OF MOTIVES.

*Nature of motives* — Internal and external motives — Are motives mere objects of choice? — *The strongest motive* — Are motives the cause of volition? — *Conditions and occasions of volition* — *Conditions of volition* — *Quotation from Mill's Logic* — Are motives the efficient cause of volition? — Are they the certain cause? — Is the efficacy of motives from the mind itself? — Willing against

*motives* — Are volitions determined by the understanding? — Do they obey the strongest motive?

THIS subject of contingent self-determination, or more properly, of no determination, is nearly allied to the inquiry concerning the nature and influence of *motives*. That which moves, inclines, induces, or influences the mind to will, and to will in a particular way, or which has a *tendency* thus to move it, is commonly called a motive. When we ask a man, from what



tendency to move the will in a particular way, at the same time, that a more powerful motive, may really move it in a different way.

There is an ambiguity in the use of the term motive, corresponding to the indefinite signification of the term will. In the language of some writers, a volition may be either an imperative act, a purpose, or an emotion. The motive to an imperative act, may be a wish to execute some previous purpose. The motive to a purpose, is the desire of obtaining some

object which is viewed as eligible. That which immediately excites the volition in this case, is an affection of the mind, an emotion, an *internal* motive. But that which excites the emotion itself, may be an object *without* the mind, an *external* motive. A tree loaded with fair and delicious fruit, excites desire in the beholder. This desire may move him to pluck the fruit. The fruit itself is an external motive. The desire which stimulates to the act of gathering it, is an internal motive. One act of















nature, and state, and feelings of the mind, which acts in view of them. But if a motive has any influence on the determination of the will, it is *one* of the antecedents on which the volition depends. Yet if it is an *external* object, it is not the *immediate* antecedent. An executive volition must be preceded by an *emotion*. This is an act or state of the mind. Before this emotion can be felt, there must be an *apprehension* of the object. This is also a state of the mind. Apprehension and emotion must both intervene, between the

external motive and the volition. The object, then, can have no influence on the volition, except by influencing the mind; in other words, there must be not only a motive, but an agent. The agent does not will without motives; nor do motives will without an agent.

It is frequently said, that motives are not the cause, but the *condition* or *occasion* of volition. This phraseology may be very proper, provided it be granted, that volition is, in any degree, *dependent* on motives. It is immaterial,





the consequent volition to be one way rather than another: without them, there can be no choice; and where they exist, it is a matter of absolute contingency, whether the will complies with them or not.

The expression ‘conditions of volition’ *may* be used, and perhaps with propriety, to signify those qualifications, circumstances, opportunities, &c., without which the agent could not will at all, or could not will with respect to particular objects; but which have no























The entrance of an individual into a social circle, may draw admiration from some of the company, and envy from others. An event which makes a very *deep* impression upon a man of acute sensibility, may make a very *slight* one, upon a person of cooler temperament. An object may excite very different feelings, even in the *same* mind, at different times. The merry song, which has been so welcome to a man in his hours of gaiety, may find a discordant feeling in his breast, when he is











side, there is *no* influence, *any* influence on the opposite side must turn the scale. Whatever does not do this, has no influence in the case.

If it be said, that acts of the *understanding*, without feeling, may be sufficient to determine the will; then these intellectual acts become *motives*. They have an *influence* on volition. The will is not left to be the sport of blind contingency. Our acts of choice are not always controlled by those emotions which appear to be the *most vivid*. We often find a determined and

settled purpose, apparently calm, but unyielding, which carries a man steadily forward, amid all the solicitations of appetite and passion. The miser's predominant inclination, brings all his other feelings in subjection to this. The inflexible determination of Howard, gave law to his emotions, and guided his benevolent movements. The triumphs of principle over passion are frequently seen, in the commanding influence which a settled propensity exercises, over feelings apparently more violent. A man's regard for











## SECTION 4: LIBERTY AND NECESSITY.

*Common notion of liberty* — *Internal freedom* — *Liberty of contingency* — *External liberty* — *Liberty to either side* — *Power to the contrary* — *Cousin's view of this* — *Cousin's analysis of the Will* — *Power of contrary choice* — *Decision of consciousness* — *No impossibility of contrary volition* — *Dr. Edwards on natural power to the contrary, and on natural and moral inability* —













determined. This is what is sometimes called *liberty to either side*, liberty of indifference, or more properly of equilibrium, of equal tendencies to opposite directions. As civil liberty is frequently supposed to be an exemption from all regulations of law; so mental liberty is thought, by some, to be a freedom from all determining influence of motives, or of anything from without. This may be called the liberty of *contingence*. It is contingent self-determination, expressed

in different terms.

5. A more scriptural meaning of freedom, is an exemption from the controlling influence and bondage of evil propensities and passions.

*“He is the freeman, whom the truth makes free; And all are slaves beside.”*

This may be called, for distinction's sake, *moral* freedom. It is far from implying, that the acts of the will are independent of *all* antecedent influence. They are brought under the



















does liberty imply, that when a man wills a certain act, it is no more likely to follow, than the contrary act; that his limbs will as soon move against his will, as with it; in other words, that there is no dependence of his external actions upon his choice, no established connection between what he does, and what he wills to do; that with the *same volitions*, his actions might be different ? A man has power to move his hand in opposite directions. Does this imply, that his *hand* has power to move in opposite directions, *in*











extracts are taken has been pronounced an “admirable analysis of the will.” It is indeed a lucid *analysis* ; a perspicuous statement of the relative place of that part of our mental operations in which imperative volition, and what is termed internal liberty, or liberty of will, are to be found. But here the discussion terminates. It is analysis, and *nothing more*. The author makes no attempt to *prove* what he affirms concerning liberty of will. Having shown *where* it lies, he contents himself with declaring, that





choice one way rather than another. The faculty of choosing or refusing particular objects implies some *knowledge* of the objects. A man can neither accept or reject that of which he knows nothing.

The other mental state referred to above is something which *influences* the will; which *inclines* it to choose one thing rather than another. Taking it at present for granted that, sometimes at least, there *is* such an influence, it is evident that this is very distinct from the mere *faculty* of willing. The latter



















matter of chance, which way his volition will turn ? The man who wills in a particular way, under the influence of certain feelings, might will differently, *under a different influence*. But while the same mind continues in precisely the same state, in the same circumstances, and under the same influence of every kind, has it power to will in opposite directions, first one way, and then the other; or if it has this power, will it ever use it ?

An appeal is made to the























there is a certainty, that he will not do an action, has to do the action, and so to defeat or remove the said certainty. I agree with Dr. West, that he has a *physical* power so to do.” [p. 18] What Dr. Edwards intends, by saying that a man has *natural* or *physical* power to do that which he is *morally unable* to do, will be easily understood by attending to the view which he has taken of natural and moral inability and necessity, in the chapter to which he here refers. Though these terms, as used, by different writers,

















a *fixed connection* between his acts and his volitions. The more invariable this dependence, the more perfect is his liberty. Whatever interrupts this connection, impairs his freedom. But according to some philosophers, liberty of will requires, that there should be *no* dependence of our volitions upon anything preceding, for being as they are, rather than otherwise. External liberty consists in a man's acting uniformly, in conformity with his will. Does internal liberty imply that he frequently wills in









## NECESSITY.

That which is the *opposite* of liberty, is commonly called *necessity*. But as various significations have been given to the term liberty, and each of these may have its opposite; necessity also has a corresponding variety of meanings. As liberty in familiar use, signifies *doing as we will*; so necessity, as it is most commonly understood, is something which *prevents* us from doing as we will. It implies





























established.” “Though volitions may be the effects of a bias of mind born with us, yet those volitions are *moral* acts, and *therefore* the necessity from which they proceed, is a moral necessity.” [*Essays on Liberty and Necessity*, pp. 13, 19.] The *effects* are called moral, because they are *themselves* right or wrong; but the *causes* are called moral, because right or wrong actions *proceed* from them. Dr. Samuel Clarke observes, that “moral necessity, in true and philosophical strictness, is not indeed



and *abstract* notion. If an expression which is so liable to be misinterpreted, is still retained in use, it ought to be employed with very great caution, and to be accompanied with such explanations as will effectually guard it against perversion.

[See *Examination of Edwards*, Sec. 2 and 3.]

## SECTION 5: ABILITY AND INABILITY.

*Inability in relation to external conduct — Natural and moral*







philosophical discussion, and even in common use, inability implies nothing more than strong disinclination. A miser *cannot* be liberal. Joseph's brethren “could *not* speak peaceably to him.” The apostle Peter speaks of men “having eyes full of adultery, and that *cannot cease from sin*” In these, and in similar instances, power is to be understood according to its *most extensive* signification, as including not only the common requisites for action, but also a *willing mind*. To distinguish the

two kinds of inability, one has been called *natural*, and the other *moral*. If there is anything besides want of inclination, which prevents a man from performing a particular act, he is said to be *naturally* unable to do it. If unwillingness is the only obstacle in the way, he is said to be *morally* unable. That which prevents a man from doing *as he will*, is natural inability. That which prevents him from doing *as he ought*, is moral inability.

In natural inability, that which is most properly



unwillingness, therefore, is opposition to the inability, and of course, cannot constitute a part of it. A son is prevented, by a perverse will, from obeying the orders of his father. There may be, at the same time, a severe struggle in his mind, between this perverseness and his apprehension of punishment, or the remonstrances of conscience, urging him to a contrary decision. But his fears of correction, or conviction of duty, are no part of the unwillingness which prevents him from obeying. They are as much





will so; or because he *could not* will so, if he would ? The first part of the alternative implies that every volition concerning which inability is predicated, is preceded by another volition. The other part implies, that the will may be opposed to itself. What then *can* be the meaning, when it is said, that a man is unable to will as he ought ? On this point theologians are not agreed. According to President Edwards, “Moral inability consists either in the want of inclination, or the strength of a contrary









definition of moral inability, is not altogether free from the difficulty of involving a controverted point. It goes on the supposition, that there is a fixed connection between motives and volitions; which many deny. His definition cannot be consistently adopted, by those who believe in contingent determination. According to them, the certain dependence of volition upon anything preceding, for being as it is, would imply a *natural* inability of acting otherwise. There are other













produce the effect. If the strength of ten men be necessary to raise a given weight, a single individual cannot do it; and therefore, in one sense, he has *no power* over the weight. But in another sense, he may be said to have *some power* with respect to it, as he possesses a part of the strength which is required to raise it. In the controversy respecting ability and inability, one party applies the term power exclusively to the *aggregate* of the antecedents upon which the effect depends; the















the name of inability.”  
[Edwards on the Will, Part I, Sec. 4, and Part III, Sec. 4.]

The common signification of inability, as has already been observed, implies *two things*; First, that there is something which will effectually *prevent* the action spoken of; Secondly, that this prevention is in *opposition* to the will; so that the man could not do the thing *if he would*. But what is called moral inability includes only *one* of these, that which will effectually *prevent* the action; though this be nothing but the will





President Edwards, "I would not be understood to suppose, that if anything comes to pass by the former kind of necessity, the *nature* of things is not concerned in it, as well as in the latter." [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec, 4.*]

This observation is as applicable to moral *inability*, as to moral necessity; for the inability to do a particular thing, is only a different expression for a necessity of *not* doing it. With some writers, the distinction between natural and moral inability appears to be this; that the former





## SECTION 6: CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

*Consciousness of power — In what sense are we conscious of self-determination ? — Liberty of indifference — Consciousness of liberty — Accountability in relation to external conduct — to acts of the will — to emotions — and to purposes — Is contingency essential to accountability? — Originating volition — Avoiding particular volitions.*







another preceding it. As both these are objects of consciousness, it may be proper to say, that we are conscious of the power of one over the other, but are we conscious that *every* act of our mind is preceded by another; that every volition is preceded by another volition?

In what sense are we conscious of a *self-determining* power? A man is conscious that he wills or determines. This implies that it is *he himself* who wills; that his volitions are his *own* acts, and not the acts of another. So far we

















it; or if he takes a deep interest in her welfare, is he conscious, that this has no effect whatever upon his conduct ? Is the Christian conscious, that nothing but the power of contingent determination, has had any influence, in turning him from sin to holiness ? It is said, that we are conscious of *originating* volition. We are, indeed, conscious, that our acts of choice proceed from ourselves. They begin with us. They are not made elsewhere, and communicated to our minds. But does this imply, that nothing antecedent

has any influence, in determining of what nature they shall be ?

## ACCOUNTABILITY.

It is frequently asserted, that a self-determining power is essential to *accountability*; to a conviction of guilt; to a feeling of moral obligation. How can a man be justly blamed or punished, for doing that which he has no power to avoid; or for omitting that which he has no power to perform? Ought he to be condemned,



in this case, is no indication of the state of his will. If he is afflicted with convulsions, his limbs move without his consent; the motions of his body do not obey the orders of his will. He is not responsible for them, because they are not, properly speaking, *his* motions.

But what is necessary to render a man accountable for *acts of the will itself*? They must, unquestionably, be his *own* acts, and not those of another. He must be the agent, the person who wills. In this sense, his





















are *his own* ; whether it is *he* that chooses ; or something else for him. The two suppositions agree in this, that it is the agent himself that wills. But according to the one, he chooses invariably as he pleases. According to the other, his volitions have no certain conformity to his feelings, desires, &c. They may as often happen to be in opposition to his wishes, as in accordance with them. How can he avoid the acts which spring up in his mind, with entire casualty ? To enable a man to avoid such volitions as



## SECTION 7: COMMON SENSE.

*Customary use of the phrase — Philosophical use — Intuitive truths — Application of common sense to philosophical speculations — Remarks of President Edwards — Decisions of common sense respecting volition, the influence of motives, and accountable agency.*

AN appeal to *common sense*, in behalf of a self-determining power of the will, is not unfrequently



with *intuition* ; the power of the mind to decide immediately respecting self-evident truths; a faculty which is common to all mankind, the learned and the unlearned. In public discussions, propositions ought not to be ranked with intuitive truths, unless, like mathematical axioms, they are *universally* admitted. That which is self-evident to one man, may not always be so to another. But for the purposes of controversial argument, some common ground must be agreed upon.



familiar. But on points of intricate philosophical speculation, it is no easy matter to bring a statement before men not versed in metaphysical phraseology, in such a shape as to be effectually guarded against misapprehension. The common people know what *liberty* means, as they are accustomed to use the word. But they are not informed of all the strange significations which are given to the term, in metaphysical speculation. According to them, a man is in the enjoyment of liberty, when he does as he





depends ? Common sense considers a man accountable for what he does willingly, when he is in possession of his reason. But does it find it necessary, before awarding praise or blame, to inquire whether the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding; whether, immediately before acting freely, it must be in a state of equilibrium; whether every volition is preceded by an infinite series of volitions ? Does a jury ever undertake to settle these points, before pronouncing on the

















efficacy of motives, is manifest in all the intercourse of life. Every instance in which one man endeavors to have an influence over the voluntary conduct of another, is an example of the universal conviction, that motives have more or less power over the will. What are persuasions, but means of giving direction to the volitions of others ? They may not always be effectual, as they are liable to be overbalanced by opposing influence. But if they have any adaptation to the purpose for which they





addressed, that we hope to render our efforts successful. The way in which we endeavor to control *our own* future volitions, is by placing ourselves in such circumstances, and bringing into view such considerations, as will tend to incline our wills, in the direction which we wish.

[See *Examination of Edwards*, Sec. 15.]

## SECTION 8: MECHANICAL AND PHYSICAL AGENCY.

*Is the will a mere*







be a machine ? Both have been *created*. Both are subject to *change*. Is the mind, therefore, nothing more nor less than a machine? The human understanding is unavoidably affected, by the objects in the world around it. Is it for this reason, a mere machine ? Is everything which is *like* another in *any* respect, to be called by the same name? Is man an elephant, because both have the faculties of hearing and seeing? Is the human mind a watch, or a clock, because its volitions *succeed* each

other, like the beats of a time piece ?

## PHYSICAL AGENCY.

Nearly allied to the objection which represents dependent volition as being mechanical, is another which considers such volition as being *physical* agency, rather than moral. The multifarious meanings of the term physical, render it difficult to determine what is intended by this objection. It is one of those pliable words, which may be made to mean one thing







gravitation, chemical  
affinity, electrical  
repulsion, mechanical  
equilibrium, the quantity  
and direction of impelling  
forces. Though matter may  
have an *influence* on the  
mind, it is not, so far as we  
know, in the way in which  
one body acts on another.  
The gold of the miser does  
not determine the acts of  
his will, by the same kind  
of force, as that by which it  
turns the beam of the  
jeweler's balance. The love  
of glory which inspires the  
warrior, does not move him  
on to battle, with an  
impulse of the same











without motives. A motive does not examine, compare, and choose. But do volitions come forth fortuitously, without being affected by any influence whatever ? Do they *depend* on nothing preceding for being as they are, rather than otherwise? Does it make no difference what motives are before the mind, when it is about to will ? The result of the same external influence, operating upon *different* minds, may undoubtedly be very different. But does this prove, that the difference in the volitions,









certainty is ambiguous. There is certainty of *knowledge*, and also a certainty in the nature and relations of *things*, which is the foundation of certain knowledge. That a sphere is two thirds of its circumscribing cylinder, was a certain truth, long before it was discovered by Archimedes.

Certain knowledge of any truth implies, that it *is* a certain truth. It is certainly known, *because* it is certainly true. Some metaphysicians maintain, that volitions which are neither certain in themselves, nor certainly

dependent on anything preceding, but wholly contingent, nevertheless, may, be certainly foreknown.

President Edwards was of a different opinion. “Metaphysical or philosophical necessity,” he observes, “is nothing different from their certainty.” But to prevent misapprehension, he adds, “I speak not now of the certainty of *knowledge*, but the certainty that is in *things themselves*, which is the *foundation* of the certainty of the knowledge of them.” “There must be a certainty in things

themselves, *before* they are certainly known.” “For certainty of knowledge is nothing else but knowing or discerning the certainty there is in the things themselves which are known.” [*Freedom of Will, Part I, See. 3, and Part II, Sec. 12.*] He is so far from admitting, that that which is uncertain in itself can be certainly foreknown, even by the Divine Mind, that he has entered into an extended argument to prove, that no future event can be certainly foreknown, whose existence is contingent.” [*Freedom of*









taking care not to annex to them any definite signification. The whole subject of the freedom of the will, may easily be thrown into utter confusion, by a liberal use of a few ambiguous words and phrases.

## SECTION 9: MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

*Has the government of God any influence upon the human will? — Has his providence any concern in giving direction to volition? — Influence of*



*limits to the power of God? — Is it certain that the highest supposable good of the universe is actually attainable? — Happiness of God — Three different theories to account for the origin of evil — Agreement of the three suppositions — Difference of the suppositions.*

THE deep interest which belongs to the subject of contingent self-determination, lies in its relation to the *moral government* of God. This, in the more enlarged acceptation of the term, is





tendency in the will to choose the one, should be exactly balanced by its tendency to choose the other; and if any influence which interposes to disturb this equilibrium, interferes with the freedom of the will; then how is it possible, that even divine power should give a direction to the acts of choice, without interfering with the accountability of the agent? The impossibility in the case, according to the supposition, is not owing to any *limitation of power*, but to an incompatibility in the *nature of things*. It is









deter from transgression ? From the exhibitions of mercy in the gospel, from the sufferings and death of the Savior, from his compassionate calls to those who are ready to perish, from the offers of a free and everlasting salvation, does there come no influence which can reach the heart, to bring forth holy affections, and purposes and works ? If both the law and the gospel are really efficacious, in restraining iniquity and promoting holiness, is this at the expense of the free agency of man ? What



















But if motives have no tendency to affect the decisions of the will, all this array of precepts and penalties, of promises and threatenings, of representations of heavenly glory, and the hopeless doom of the finally impenitent, is devoid of all efficacy, for the promotion of holiness, and the prevention of iniquity. It has no influence which can reach the empire of contingency.

**AUTHOR OF SIN.**







very nature of a moral agent, to be liable to sin by accident ? Who gave to man this nature, from which contingent volitions proceed ? Did not the author of our being *foresee* that, with such a nature as he gave us, and in such a world as that in which he placed us, we should not only be liable to sin, but should actually sin ? If the millions of millions of volitions which are put forth every moment, are all perfectly contingent; that is, if there is an even chance, with respect to each one, whether it will be



*objects* as might influence them to sin? Is he the author of sin, if he creates a being who will *certainly* sin? In our fallen world, it is certain that every rational creature of God will sin.

## PREVENTION OF SIN.

If the volitions of moral agents are under the control of the Creator, the inquiry may be made, why has he not wholly *prevented* the existence of sin? Perfect goodness must be displeased with all iniquity. If human volitions













of sin, than could result from such a change of measures in the moral system, as would be necessary in order to prevent all sin. The means which God employs, for enlarging the happiness of his kingdom, may be so perverted by his creatures, as to become the occasion of sin. The exalted natures of the angels, and their capacity for high enjoyment, may have been, to some of them, a temptation to rebellion. The bounties of providence, which in rich

abundance are spread before us for our good, are our principal temptations to sinful indulgence. The plan which infinite benevolence has devised, for the salvation of our race, is, by multitudes, perverted to licentiousness. The long-continued forbearance of God, towards sinful men, to give them an opportunity of securing eternal life, is often so abused, as greatly to aggravate their guilt. The measures of the divine providence and government are not *all* employed in *preventing*

























voluntary agents.

3. That sin is the certain consequence of the *best* moral system; the system of divine administration which will result in the highest good of the universe.

In what respects do these three suppositions *agree*, and in what do they *differ*? The advocates of each, it is presumed, will agree that the present system of the created universe, considered in all its results, in all worlds, and throughout all ages, is the *best possible*; or at least, that none *better*, if another



















These may be adopted, not merely to furnish an opportunity of overruling sin for good; but for the valuable results which they are fitted directly to produce, greatly overbalancing the evil of sin and its consequences, of which they are, by perversion, the occasion. This explanation does not imply, that sin and its consequences are *preferred* to holiness and its consequences, in the circumstances in which sin is actually committed. It does not imply that, in these circumstances, sin



hypothetical systems, we have no practical concern. All our interests lie in that one which a God of boundless wisdom and benevolence has chosen; and which we therefore conclude to be the best possible.

In this real universe, we have abundant evidence, both from His word and His providence, that He *does* restrain sin; and therefore, that this interposition is not inconsistent with accountable agency. To what extent this prevention might be carried, in any



## SECTION 10: ACTIVITY AND DEPENDENCE.

*Ambiguity of the terms active and passive — Can anything be active and passive, at the same time? — Mental activity — Can volition be passive? — Can an agent be, in any sense, passive? — Can any being act, if he is acted upon? — Mr. Chubb on action and passion.*

To the supposition, that the will is dependent on anything without itself, for the nature of its volitions, it

is objected, that an accountable agent must be an *active* being ; that dependence implies, that he who is the subject of it is *passive*; and that these are *opposite* qualities, each being inconsistent with the other; so that he who is active cannot, at the same time, be passive or dependent. These are terms of very convenient ambiguity, with which it is easy to construct a plausible but fallacious argument. The word *passive* is sometimes used to signify that which is *inactive*. With this



cannon shot is said to be passive, with respect to the charge of powder which impels it. But is there no activity given to the ball ? Is not the whirlwind active, when it tears up the forest ? If it is, does this prove that it has no cause; that it has not received its impulse from anything without itself? But are not cause and effect, you ask, opposite in their nature? They are opposite *relations*; but not always opposite things. The very same thing may be both cause and effect. The mountain wave, which is

the effect of the wind, may be the cause which buries the ship in the ocean. The stream of volcanic lava, which is the cause of ruin to fields, and herds, and villages, may be the effect of internal fires and vapors. The same thing is not both cause and effect, *in the same respect*. It is not the cause of its antecedents, nor the effect of its consequents. It is not passive, in the same sense, in the same *relation*, in which it is active. The axe is passive, with respect to the hand which moves it; but active, with respect to the









make his anomalous vocabulary understood. But he has no right to avail himself of this license, to offer to the public deceptive arguments, which derive all their plausibility from an artful interchange of his own, with the common meaning.

It is asserted, that to be *an agent*, is to act independently of external influence. If this is given as a definition of an agent, it remains still to be shown, that the human mind is *in fact* such an agent. The definition is of no use, unless it correspond with

the real nature of the being to whom it is applied. Is it a self-evident truth, that man is such an agent, that neither his natural constitution, nor his acquired propensities, neither his bodily appetites, nor external objects, have any influence in determining the nature of his volitions ? Can this be proved by any analogy with the material world ? The vapor which gives motion to the steam engine, the fire which devours a dwelling, the wind which sweeps over the ocean, are all very







urged, that to suppose a man to be caused to act freely, is inconsistent with the *definition* of free agency? Would it not be more to the purpose, to endeavor to render our definitions conformable to the reality of things; rather than to take it for granted, that facts correspond with our arbitrary definitions? Dr. Reid appears to suppose, that that which is *acted upon* cannot act. Would he say, that the water wheel cannot act, when it is acted upon by the stream? I am aware that his observations were



preceding ; it is easy to see, that *such* agency, if such there ever was or can be, in the human mind, is inconsistent with being acted upon. But it ought to be understood, that a definition is not argument. It is of itself no proof. Though it may be the basis of an argument, yet something more is necessary, to justify us in drawing a conclusion. In all cases, except those in which our reasoning is merely *hypothetical*, it is essential to a good definition, that it correspond with *fact*. How,













the cause of nothing. Again, if nothing which is an effect can be a cause, then as all created things are effects, He who made them must be the only cause in the universe.

## SECTION 11: FATALISM AND PANTHEISM.

*Different forms of Fatalism — Many of the ancient Fatalists believed the acts of the will not to be determined by the Fates — Is there no middle ground, between Fatalism and the doctrine of contingent*







in the world are under the guidance of *a being of infinite wisdom and infinite goodness*. This was so far from being the case, that the *Gods themselves* were represented, by the doctrine, as being under the control of the Fates. According to the astrological Fatalists, everything was affected by influence derived from the motions, positions, and aspects of the heavenly bodies. The Stoics and some other sects held to an eternal succession of causes and effects, analogous to the infinite









influence, from infinite wisdom and benevolence?

[See *Examination of Edwards*, latter part of Sec. 17.]

*Pantheism.* — The suggestion that a denial of contingent self-determination leads to Pantheism, is as indefinite in its application, as the charge of Fatalism. The doctrine of Pantheism, as held by Spinoza and his followers, is that the universe is God; that all finite existences are only *modes* of the one infinite substance. With him agree substantially the Hindoo,

Persian, Grecian, and German Pantheists. With some diversity in the mode of representation, they concur in the statement, that all finite beings, both material and immaterial, either constitute God, or are parts of God; that there is but one substance in the universe ; that all the phenomena in the world are properties, manifestations, or developments, of the divine existence. These are sometimes spoken of as *emanations* from the substance of the Deity; parts separated from Him



our existence his existence? Is it Pantheism to believe, that he "worketh in us, both to will and to do?" Does such agency of his imply, that *he only* acts in the case ; that there is neither willing nor acting on our part; that there is really but one agent in the universe ?

Pantheism is so far from coinciding with the doctrine, that God is the original cause of all other beings, with their modes of existence and of action, that it does not even admit that there *are* other beings; that either matter or mind





## SECTION 12: TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE.

*Difficulty of settling the question before us by philosophical discussion — Appeal to scripture testimony — Upon what principle, are the scriptures to be interpreted? — How far are we to make their meaning conform to our previous opinions? — Does scripture ever contradict reason? — Has God any agency in determining the acts of the will? — He causes his people to do his*































learned without revelation, but some which are *different* from conclusions obtained by our unassisted reason ; the main inquiry returns upon us, in what way are we to come to a knowledge of the latter class ? If I open the book of God, with a determination to find nothing there opposed to the opinions which I have previously formed, how am I to discover any truths not known before, though written there, in the most distinct and intelligible characters ? How is it possible for me to receive











arrangements of his providence; and sometimes by the special agency of his Spirit. If in any or all of these ways, he gives a direction to our volitions, they are not left to the determination of chance; they are not, in the absolute sense, contingent.

Absolute contingency is incompatible with the influence of any cause. But God is said to *cause* his people to do his will. “I will put my Spirit within you, and *cause* you to walk in my statutes.” “The Lord God will *cause* righteousness and praise to











to the Thessalonians: “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love.” “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments,” says the Psalmist. “The Lord *direct* your hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ.” [*Isaiah 63:17; Psalm 119:35; 2 Thessalonians 3:5*]

The power of God over the hearts of men, is exercised according to the arrangements and purposes of his infinite wisdom. “Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered





*will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication. Thy people shall be willing, in the day of thy power.”*

*[Ezek. 36:24, 26, 27; Jer. 32:40; Zech. 12:10; Psa.*



with *salvation*. “God hath, from the beginning, chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” [1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13]

The work of God, changing the heart from sin to righteousness, is represented as the exercise of *creative* power. “Create in me a clean heart,” says David, “and renew a right spirit within me.” “We are his workmanship, *created* unto good works.” [Psalm 51:10; Eph. 2:10]

The *continuance* of a religious life, as well as its commencement, is











*makes* them obedient, they really obey. If he *turns* their hearts to himself, they themselves turn to the Lord. If he gives them a new heart and a right spirit, they exercise the affections of a new and obedient heart. Not that the agency of God in renewing the heart, is identified with the agency of men; but the one is the *consequence* of the other, is *dependent* on the other. *His* turning them is not *their* turning. Their obedience is not his obedience. His giving them repentance is not their repentance. But







unto Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thy hand. But I will harden his heart, that he will not let the people go."

*[Exodus 4:21]*

It appears that he had a *purpose* to accomplish, in relation to the hardening of the king's heart. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth my armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of











Do you say, that he left them to be hardened, under the course of his *providence*? Then the course of his providence, his own providential dispensations, had an *influence* on them. Is the declaration of the apostle, that “he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth,” consistent with the supposition, that God has no power to prevent the hardening of the heart? Is there no *distinguishing* interposition, in the case of those who are “vessels of mercy?” Do all these









































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